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ONLINE DATABASES

BY CAROL TENOPIR

What's New with WILSONLINE

ALTHOUGH WILSONLINE, H.W. Wilson Company's online system, has only been available for a year-and-a-half (after many years of development), many enhancements to the system and new related products are coming in 1986. In my column of September 1, 1984, I described the new WILSONLINE system and its features. In this month's column I discuss some of the changes coming to WILSONLINE this year.

Databases

All of the H.W. Wilson indexes are now available on WILSONLINE, as are three Wilson Directory/Authority files and the LC MARC file. Additional databases will be added this year. These will include several U.S. government indexes, such as the *Index to Government Publications* and *GPO Monthly Catalog*, and the U.K. MARC file. According to John Regazzi, H.W. Wilson vice president, other government databases, including both full text and bibliographic, are being considered on a selected basis.

Retrospectivity

One of the most frequent complaints from librarians using WILSONLINE is the lack of retrospective indexing. Most of the online Wilson indexes cover materials only as far back as 1983 or 1984. Retrospective conversion is an expensive

proposition, but according to Regazzi it is being looked at on a case-by-case basis. Already the *Index to Legal Periodicals* has been taken back to 1981. *Social Sciences Index* will soon go back to the late 1970s. Others being considered for conversion are *Art Index*, *Humanities Index*, and *Readers'*

Guide to Periodical Literature. Retrospective indexing on these would cover approximately the same years as the *Social Sciences Index*.

Abstracts

None of the WILSONLINE print or online indexes currently include abstracts. Abstracts have been created for two years of *Readers' Guide*, however, and are being sold on microfiche only as a new product called *Readers' Guide Abstracts*. Regazzi says that before adding the abstracts to the online file there are some technical problems to be worked out. It has not been determined whether abstracts would go into a separate database or be integrated into the bibliographic *Readers' Guide* file. Pricing would need to be determined. Also, Wilson wants to see how the microfiche product affects the market. "A lot is up in the air" regarding online abstracts, says Regazzi, and "not much has been decided [yet] so nothing will happen soon." In the meantime, *Readers' Guide* users have three separate products to choose from: print, online, and microfiche.

Laser disc

Wilson is moving to make its products available on many different media. Print, online, and now microfiche will be joined by a laser disc product by the end of this year or the beginning of 1987. Although there is no specific date when the first laser disc product from Wilson will be available for sale, it is in Beta test sites now. Both compact discs (CD-ROM) and 12-inch discs were developed in prototype. The Beta test will help determine exactly what will be sold and whether small portions of several Wilson indexes or larger portions of a single file will be made available.

The first CD-ROM prototype included four Wilson files: *Readers' Guide*, *Cumulative Book Index*, *Business Periodicals Index*, and *Applied Science and Technology Index*. The

time coverage on the CD-ROM for each file is the same as is online. The 12-inch disc prototype system included one year of indexing for several Wilson databases. The laser disc product will contain a replica of the WILSONLINE search software.

The Wilson Company sees laser discs as another distribution mechanism that will complement, not replace, their other products. Regazzi pointed out that online indexes are more current because they are updated twice a week. In online access the user pays only for the time spent online and the amount of information printed. Laser disc products offer all of the powerful search advantages of online files, but will be sold on a subscription basis. They will not be as up-to-date as the online files, but the cost will be a fixed subscription rate that is more easily predicted in the library's budget. Regazzi firmly believes that all media will coexist and there will be a continuing market for online, print, and microfiche products as well as for laser discs.

WILSONLINE Version 2

Promised enhancements to the WILSONLINE search software will be available this summer. Most welcome will be proximity searching and the ability to do nested Boolean logic. Proximity features will allow words to be searched adjacent to each other, within a specified number of words, in the same sentence and in the same paragraph. Proximity allows more precise searches and will be especially important if abstracts are added. Nested Boolean will allow more complex search statements as different Boolean operators such as AND and OR can be mixed in one search statement.

Version 2 will feature enhanced automatic term mapping and thesaurus "Expand" features. Presently if a term or phrase for which there is a "see" reference is entered and retrieves zero hits, the system maps to the correct term and performs the



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search. This system is not presently satisfactory when there are some hits on an incorrect term or phrase. (For example if you are searching free text, the term "IBM" will retrieve some documents from the title. Wilson uses International Business Machines, under which would be many more hits, but the system will not now map to the preferred term because of the title hits). *Version 2* will tell you about the alternative form and allow you to search one or both word forms.

Additional enhancements will include better multifile printing that will allow users to print the most current records retrieved in each database, enhanced "Help messages," and more detailed cost information. Regazzi says that they are "genuinely excited about this next release of *WILSONLINE*."

WILSEARCH

WILSONLINE, like its competitors *DIALOG*, *ORBIT*, and *BRS*, is most appropriate for intermediary users who search frequently. Last year Wilson entered the end user market with *WILSEARCH*, a front-end software package. For a review of *WILSEARCH* see my February 15, 1986 column (*LJ*, p. 60-61) and Mick O'Leary's "*WILSONLINE: a New Departure for an Old Institution*" (*Online*, March 1986, p. 102-107).

Wilson is making changes even to this new product. A second improved version of *WILSEARCH* has been available since early this year. This new version includes menu choices for all of the new *WILSONLINE* databases and makes the program initialization process easier than it was with the old version. A follow-up survey of users may lead to further enhancements in the future.

At present, *WILSEARCH* users must have an IBM PC or compatible microcomputer. A hardware/software turnkey package for *WILSEARCH* will be available this year from H.W. Wilson as they have just become an authorized value-added dealer of IBM microcomputers. An Apple version of the software will be available late in 1986.

Users

To date, Regazzi says the primary users of *WILSEARCH* are college and university libraries that are making *WILSEARCH* available for stu-

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dent use. Some public libraries are using it as well. Once the Apple version is available, Regazzi anticipates more use by school libraries.

According to Regazzi, the use of the full *WILSONLINE* system parallels the online use of other systems. Almost equal use comes from college/university libraries and special libraries. (Special libraries do not usually also use *WILSEARCH*, however.) Public libraries place a distant third in *WILSONLINE* accounts, with as yet only very limited use in school libraries.

Documentation and training

An excellent full-day *WILSONLINE* training session is now available throughout the country. Subject seminars are now being offered at the *WILSONLINE* training center in New York and should be ready for other locations by the fall. These half-day sessions are built around the Wilson databases, including sessions on: 1) Business/Social Sciences, 2) Science, 3) Arts and Humanities, 4) General (including the book indexes and *Readers' Guide*), 5) Library Literature/Education, and 6) Legal. Each will be \$30.

An advanced seminar, now under development, may also be available in other locations by fall. It will be for people who have attended the beginning seminar or who have been searching after teaching themselves with the printed tutorial and documentation. The advanced seminar will also provide a forum for discussing new software enhancements. This will cost \$60 for a full day.

Starting in July, Wilson will publish a quarterly *WILSONLINE* newsletter. A company spokesman said

that it may become a monthly publication later. The newsletter joins an excellent looseleaf user manual that is updated regularly. In addition to the comprehensive manual there is a *WILSONLINE* tutorial used in training classes and for self-instruction. A revised version has just been completed.

Future plans

Wilson made the decision to create their own online system so they could maintain control over their indexes and remain responsive to their loyal library clientele. According to Regazzi, they are not committed to exclusive distribution, however. He says that "Wilson will consider putting databases up on other distribution channels on a selected basis." By the ALA meeting in July they will announce the availability of *WILSONLINE* via alternative gateways.

Judging from all of the announcements made by Wilson in the first year-and-a-half of their online service, we should continue to expect new enhancements and products from *WILSONLINE*. The winners of the 1985 Dartmouth Medal of the ALA Reference and Adult Services Division for "achievement in creating outstanding reference works" can be expected to continue to emphasize quality in addition to their new role as online innovators.

Selected Further Reading

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